

SISTER CARRIE
AND
AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY:
THE PUBLISHERS' JUDGMENTS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
School of Humanities
Morehead State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in English

by
Barbara A. Martin
May 1981

15-4
3

Accepted by the faculty of the School of Humanities, Morehead State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree.

Judy R. Rogers
Director of Thesis

Master's Committee: Judy R. Rogers, Chairman
L. R. W. W. W.
Charles J. Bulger

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
I. Corresponding Elements in <u>Sister Carrie</u> and <u>An American Tragedy</u>	3
II. Changing Literary Tastes	24
III. Conclusion	44
BIBLIOGRAPHY	47

SISTER CARRIE

AND

AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY:

THE PUBLISHERS' JUDGMENTS

Barbara A. Martin, MA

Morehead State University, 1980

Theodore Dreiser's literary career spans a time of change in social, political, and economic elements in American society, especially 1900-1925. These changes appear to be shown through a shift in publishers' attitudes as evidenced by their rejection of Sister Carrie in 1900 and their acceptance of An American Tragedy in 1925. Sister Carrie was rejected for publication by Harper's Weekly and Harper and Brothers. It was accepted by Walter Page for Doubleday, Page; however, Doubleday refused to publish the novel because he considered it pornographic. When forced by Dreiser, Doubleday published the novel but refused to promote its sale.

Later, Dreiser submitted An American Tragedy for publication and the novel was readily accepted by Liveright who promoted its sale with an essay contest offering \$500 as first prize.

The purpose of this thesis is to discover why Sister Carrie was rejected in 1900 and An American Tragedy accepted twenty-five years later. Did Dreiser's style and themes change during that time or did literary tastes change; and, if so, what caused the change.

The necessity of finding data to document an investigation of the problem led to a working bibliography on the literary, social, economic, and political trends and developments of the period. In addition to Dreiser's An American Tragedy and Sister Carrie (both the edition edited by Donald Pizer and the one edited by Claude Simpson) sources included Frederick Lewis Allen's The Big Change: America Transforms Itself 1900-1950, Daniel J. Boorstin's The Democratic Experience, Herbert W. Edwards and Robert W. Horton's Backgrounds in Literary Thought, Arthur S. Link's American Epoch: A History of the United States Since the 1880's, and Blanche H. Gelfant's The American City Novel: Theodore Dreiser, Thomas Wolfe, Sherwood Anderson, Edith Wharton, John Dos Passos, James T. Bishop, Willard Motley, and Others.

From the sources began to emerge a definite correlation between the themes of Sister Carrie and those of An American Tragedy. Both novels contained themes of: (1) the rejected family, (2) the conflict between personal desire and conventional restraint, and (3) the element of change; and both are written in a nonjudgmental tone. A distinct pattern of change in literary, social, political, and economic attitudes brought about by domestic and foreign influences was revealed by the sources on American life from 1900-1925.

In addition, the sources showed that both domestic and foreign influences served to expose American society to customs and ideas that opposed conventional moral and social ethics and that these customs were being incorporated into the American lifestyle. Domestic influences included a shift from an agrarian society to an urban one as a result

of growth in industry, an influx of immigrants, the fall of the Genteel tradition, and the automobile revolution. Outside influences came from the introduction of foreign ideas such as pragmatism, Marxism, naturalism, and Freudianism. World War I had internal and external implications, setting the state for the live-for-today attitude of the "Roaring Twenties." During Prohibition the United States saw an increase in organized crime resulting in a social laxity toward dress, manners, drinking, and sex.

Therefore, because of the similarity of themes in Sister Carrie and An American Tragedy and the evidence of domestic and foreign influences on American society, it is conceivable that the change in publishers' attitudes between the publication of Sister Carrie and that of An American Tragedy resulted from a change in American social, political, and economic concepts rather than a change in Dreiser's style and themes.

Accepted by:

Judy R. Rogers, Chairman
E. R. McOblin
Charles J. Pelkey

INTRODUCTION

Theodore Dreiser's literary career spans a time of change in literary tastes. His first novel was rejected by Harper's Weekly and Harper and Brothers,¹ but Doubleday, Page accepted the novel for publication in 1900. Although Frank Norris and Walter H. Page felt that the novel was superior and Page had told Dreiser that the Company would publish Sister Carrie, Doubleday objected to the novel's subject matter and refused to publish it. He considered the novel immoral.²

When forced by Dreiser to fulfill Page's promise, Doubleday published a limited number of copies. Of the 1018 copies printed, 129 were given to reviewers, 465 were sold on the market, and 423 were sold to the T. J. Taylor Company to be sold by subscription.³ Yet, even though he published Sister Carrie, Doubleday refused to promote the novel because he felt that the subject matter would be offensive to the reading public.⁴

¹Vrest Orton, Dreiserana (New York: The Cocorua Bibliographies, 1929), pp. 13-14.

²Theodore Dreiser, "Letters" (July 19, 1900) in Sister Carrie: An Authorative Text, Background and Sources, Criticism, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 438.

³Orton, pp. 17-18.

⁴Dreiser, "Letters," p. 438.

In 1925, Dreiser submitted An American Tragedy for publication. It was accepted without hesitation. The subject matter of An American Tragedy is similar to that of Sister Carrie. However, in 1925, An American Tragedy was considered to have potential for success. Live-right printed 18,200 copies, and sale of the novel was promoted by a contest offering \$500 for the best essay to be entitled "Was Clyde Griffiths Guilty of Murder in the First Degree?"⁵

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the reasons that publishers apparently considered Sister Carrie unacceptable in 1900 and An American Tragedy acceptable in 1925. In order to determine why one was accepted and one rejected, two questions must be answered: Did Dreiser change his style and themes during the twenty-five years between the publication of the two novels or did literary tastes of the reading public change? If the latter, what elements caused this change? To answer the above questions, a close look at the subject matter of the two novels is essential to determine the reasons that Sister Carrie was rejected and An American Tragedy was accepted.

⁵Orton, p. 52.

CHAPTER I
CORRESPONDING ELEMENTS
IN
SISTER CARRIE AND AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY

Central to the publishers' attitudes toward Sister Carrie was the subject matter. At the time Sister Carrie was presented for publication, the nation was still recovering from the Civil War. Industry had begun to flourish, bringing with it a group of problems with which the American people had never before had to contend. Marjorie Barrows states that:

The war between the states was over, but the forces it had set in motion were to make as deep and lasting an impression on American culture as the War of Independence. The strongest of these forces was the rapid growth of industry, which began to dominate the economic life not only of the North but of the South as well.⁶

Nevertheless, a rapid change in industry did not mean a corresponding change in lifestyle or fundamental social and moral attitudes. According to Barrows, "...the opening of the twentieth century did not show any marked change in American life. The social, political, economic, and scientific forces operating in the period following the War Between the States were still at work in the early twentieth century."⁷

⁶Marjorie Wescott Barrows, Frances L. Hueston, and Marcus Konick, The Study of Literature (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1959), p. 18.

⁷Ibid., p. 19.

Dreiser, however, saw the lifestyle of the city as being different from the slow-moving simplicity of rural life that is a product of conventional moral and social standards. His realistic portrayal of city-life caused both Harper and Doubleday, Page to reject Sister Carrie. The publishers, especially Doubleday, felt Dreiser's portrayal of city life was not a view to which the reading public should be exposed.⁸

The view to which Doubleday objected is carried by the themes which Dreiser developed in his novel. Yet, Richard Lehan states that these themes are found not only in Sister Carrie but in all of Dreiser's fiction:

The themes of Sister Carrie--the rejected family, the journey to the towering city, the struggle against poverty, the desire for wealth, the illusion of limitless opportunity, the conflict between personal desire and conventional restraint, the urge to reject such convention, the effect of cosmic and social forces upon ignorant man, and the sweep of the tide of humanity toward a mysterious and hidden shore--these and other key themes dominate Dreiser's fiction from Sister Carrie.

The themes that most clearly show the material questioned by Frank Doubleday in Sister Carrie are: 1) the rejected family, 2) the conflict between personal desire and conventional restraint, and 3) the element of chance. Through the development of these themes, Dreiser shows the discrepancies between what society viewed as truth and the actual social conditions of the early twentieth century. These themes are found in

⁸Dreiser, "Letters," p. 438

⁹Richard Lehan, Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), pp. 1-2.

Sister Carrie and An American Tragedy despite the distinction that the publishers made between the two novels.

The theme of the rejected family in Sister Carrie is shown first through Carrie and Hurstwood. Carrie Meeber leaves her parents' home to travel to Chicago to live with her sister, Minnie. She has a few seconds of panic at leaving everything that is familiar, but her home ties are easily and completely severed by "a gush of tears at her mother's farewell kiss," "a touch in her throat" as she passes where her father is working, and "a pathetic sigh" as she leaves the village that has been her home for eighteen years.¹⁰

After arriving in Chicago and moving into Minnie's flat, Carrie finds a job and gives all but fifty cents of her weekly earnings to her sister. Later, she loses her job and is being pushed by Minnie and Sven, Minnie's husband, to return home. Rather than accept again the poverty of her family, Carrie rejects family ties to move into a flat rented by Drouet. At first, Carrie refuses to move, but Drouet "secured an accurate detail of the atmosphere" of Minnie and Sven's flat (SC, p. 65). He persuades Carrie that Minnie and Sven will not care if she leaves. She thinks about moving and tells him that she will meet him at Peoria Street. Carrie returns to the flat, and at "six her determination was hardened" (SC, p. 65). She once again breaks with her family. However, this time Carrie not only rejects her family ties,

¹⁰Theodore Dreiser, Sister Carrie: An Authorative Text, Background and Sources, Criticism, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 5. All further quotations from Sister Carrie will be indicated in the text SC and the page number.

but also violates a conventional social taboo. She moves away from the protection of her family to live in a flat paid for by a man who is not her husband.

Hurstwood also severs his family ties. He and his wife have not had an intimate relationship for some years. The arrangement between them did not include the love and consideration usually associated with marriage, but was "a river of indifference" (SC, p. 120). Therefore, when Hurstwood falls in love with Carrie, he further jeopardizes his family position, for "... the complete ignoring by Hurstwood of his home came with growth of his affection for Carrie..." (SC, p. 120). Not only does he entirely lose interest in his family, he also thinks of the time "...when Drouet was disposed of entirely and she was waiting evenings in cozy little quarters for him..." (SC, p. 123).

This break with his family causes him to turn to Carrie when he flees Chicago after he robs Fitzgerald and Moy's. Carrie has already been told by Drouet that Hurstwood is married. She becomes angry with Hurstwood for deceiving her and with Drouet for not telling her sooner. Hurstwood knows that Carrie will not go with him voluntarily, so he tells her that Drouet is badly hurt and that he will take her to him. On the train Carrie learns the truth and wants to get off at the next station. He finally persuades her to go with him to Montreal. Thus, Hurstwood totally rejects his family, and Carrie consents to breaking her ties with Drouet. Once again Carrie violates the social code by running away with a married man.

In An American Tragedy, Clyde Griffiths, Esta Griffiths, and Roberta Alden all reject their families for the pursuit of a better life. Clyde is ashamed that his parents are "street preachers"¹¹ on the side walks of Kansas City. He is also ashamed that his parents force him to participate in the services. Therefore, when he gets a job at the drug-store, he is delighted that his job will not allow him to be home for the services. In addition to his release from his parents' routine, he is most interested in "how, if at all, he was to keep the major portion of all of his money for himself..." (AT, p. 54). He has been giving his mother most of his money to help with household expenses. To avoid this, he decides to lie to his mother about the money he is making and to tell her that the clothes he will purchase with the rest of his money have been bought on credit. He justifies having to buy new clothes by telling her that he cannot be seen going to work in the shabby clothes he now has.

Later, when his sister, Esta, needs help, he is torn between giving his mother the money for the doctor to deliver Esta's baby and buying a coat for Hortense Briggs. Clyde knows that he should help his mother. At the same time he knows that if he does not buy the coat for Hortense, he will lose her. He struggles with his conscience during his mother's conversation. He finally agrees to give his mother five dollars and promises to try to give her ten the next week. All the time he has fifty

¹¹Theodore Dreiser, An American Tragedy (New York: New American Library, 1953), p. 12. All further quotations from An American Tragedy will be indicated in the text by AT and the page number.

dollars, the amount needed for the doctor for Esta, in his pocket. Thus, Clyde rejects his family by refusing to help Esta and his mother, knowing that his mother will have to work more hours to earn the fifty dollars.

When Clyde meets his uncle, Samuel Griffiths, he readily invents a lie to cover the fact that his parents are poor. Clyde tells his uncle that his father runs a lodging house with about fifty rooms. Clyde wants to make a good impression on his uncle, and to do so he denies his family's poverty. He feels that his uncle will hold him in higher esteem.

Esta Griffiths leaves home with a man whose identity is unknown. She does not tell her family good-bye, but leaves a note instead. The implication of this scene is that Esta would rather break with conventional morality than remain living in her present family situation. Esta faces the same alternative as Carrie and takes the same avenue of escape.

Roberta Alden leaves home to go to Lycurgus, New York, to find work so that she can help her family. The Alden family lives in a rundown house that Mr. Alden inherited, on a farm that was also inherited. Mr Alden is less than adequate as a farmer. He remains on the farm because he finds living in poverty easier than trying to go elsewhere. Still, Roberta does not reject her family in the same way that Clyde and Carrie do. She wants to help her mother. Nevertheless, Roberta, like Clyde and Carrie, wants to rise above her family's poverty. In order to do this, she must leave her parents' home and go to the city to find work.

The significance of these rejections is that all of the characters deny their families in order to have an opportunity for a better life. As a result of these rejections, each of the characters commits acts that

violate the social and religious standards of the time. Carrie moves from her sister's flat into a flat paid for by Drouet and eventually moves into an apartment with him. She has an affair with a married man, Hurstwood, and later, goes to live with him. Hurstwood abandons his family to run away with Carrie. Clyde rejects his family in order to live a life of gaiety with his fellow workers and to acquire clothes. He becomes involved with a group that drinks hard and visits brothels. Esta runs away from home with a man who does not marry her. When she becomes pregnant and has no one to help her, she returns home to have her child. While Roberta is living in Lycurgus with Grace Marr, she meets Clyde and lies to Grace in order to see Clyde because workers are not allowed to date their supervisors. Later she lies to Grace so that she can accompany Clyde to hotels outside the city. Roberta, too, becomes pregnant without being married.

Although each of the characters leaves home, there are differences in the final outcome of their lives. Carrie, after a period of ups and downs, becomes a successful actress. Hurstwood becomes a derelict and finally commits suicide. Nevertheless, his death does not seem a retaliation for his sins, but rather a result of his once having money and prestige and now being unable to cope with poverty. The fact that Hurstwood is at the limit of his endurance is shown in the events preceding his death. He goes to Carrie at the theatre for a handout. The doorman throws him out and he falls in the snow. Feeling pain and a sense of shame, he yells at the man telling him that "I--I hired such as you once..." and turns and walks off "begging, crying, losing touches

of his thoughts, one after the other" (SC, p. 411). He goes to a house on the Bowery where he can spend the night for fifteen cents and in his room he takes off his clothes, putting his coat and vest in the crack under the door. He puts his "old, wet, cracked hat" on the table (SC, p. 416). He ceases to struggle with his poverty.

After a few moments, in which he reviewed nothing, but merely hesitated, he turned the gas on again, but applied no match... When the odor reached his nostrils, he quit his attitude and fumbled for the bed.

"What's the use?" he said weakly, as he stretched himself to rest. (SC, p. 416)

Clyde, unlike Carrie, is totally defeated at the end of An American Tragedy. He is executed for killing Roberta. However, death is once again not a retaliation for sin. Rather, Dreiser portrays Clyde's death as a result of being caught up on the forces of political ambition. The coroner of Cataraqui County, Fred Heit, sees in Roberta's letter to her mother a motive for suspecting that Roberta was murdered. He decides to take the letter directly to the district attorney, Orville W. Mason. Since Mason is a friend of Heit's, Heit sees the letter, along with his friendship, as an opportunity for "not only the nomination for but his election to the six-year term judgeship" (AT, pp. 500-501).

Roberta also dies at the end of the novel, the victim of an accident. However, she is, in addition, the victim of social pressures that compel both her and Clyde to try to find a solution to her dilemma. She sees marriage to Clyde as a way of saving her reputation. By marrying Clyde, she will regain her respectability. Roberta feels that although Clyde does not want to get married, maybe he will grow to like her again because she still loves him.

Clyde does not have such optimistic feelings about marriage to Roberta. He views the marriage as the end of his hope for a better life through marriage to Sondra Finchley. He feels near hatred toward Roberta, not because of Roberta herself but because of the imposition she places upon his dreams for the future. Therefore, when Roberta falls into the lake, Clyde is torn between helping her out and letting her drown. He delays too long and she dies.

Esta does not die. She returns home to the poverty and drudgery she tried to escape. Her life is not better than it was before she left home. She moves to Denver with the family, and Dreiser does not continue her story except for mentioning her in a letter to Clyde from his mother. Mrs. Griffith tells Clyde that Esta has a son and that she helps to take care of the rooms connected to their Denver mission. The fact that Esta does not appear in the novel after this incident is significant. There is no need for her to appear again because Dreiser uses Esta to show the alternatives available to both Roberta and Clyde. Roberta, especially, has the opportunity to go home to have her baby. Clyde's return would have been more difficult because of the hit-and-run accident. However, both refuse to go home. On the other hand, Carrie achieves a measure of success through the men in her life and her acting career and, except for the brief time before she becomes Drouet's mistress, does not face the problem of going home to poverty.

Along with the rejection-of-family theme runs the theme of conflict between personal and conventional restraint of that desire. This conflict is seen indepth in the two novels through the two major characters.

Carrie Meeber's conflict between what she wants to do and what she should do is motivated by her desire for social position and wealth. Her idea of wealth is measured by fashion. Carrie's first conflict arises on the train between her home and Chicago when she meets Drouet, whom Dreiser refers to as a "masher." Carrie knows that she should not talk to this strange man, but his good looks and the richness of his clothes persuade her to talk to him. Of her struggle, Dreiser says her "maidenly reserve, and a certain sense of what was conventional under the circumstances, called her to forestall and deny his familiarity..." (SC, p. 6). However, her adherence to social conventions falls under "the daring and magnetism of the individual" (SC, p. 6). In trying to get a more favorable response from Carrie, Drouet mentions two stores in Carrie's hometown. She is "aroused by memories of longings their show windows cost her" (SC, p. 8). Drouet realized that Carrie's main interest is fashion, and he "followed it deftly" (SC, p. 9). All traces of Carrie's restraint at talking to a stranger vanish.

Carrie arrives in Chicago and finds a job but becomes ill during the winter and loses her job. She knows that she should go home. Minnie and Sven do not want to keep her any longer.

Carrie also knows that she should return the twenty dollars Drouet has given her. She begins to feel ashamed that she has taken the money. In the department store she wanders around in a troubled mood. Carrie has the money for a jacket, but she weighs her situation. She is "possessed of the means, lured by desire, yet deterred by conscience or want of decision" (SC, p. 61). She tries to return the money but Drouet refuses it. Instead, he talks Carrie into moving out of her sister's

flat into one rented by him. Carrie knows that she should not do what Drouet wants. However, her desire to stay in Chicago and her desire to get away from the atmosphere of Minnie and Sven's flat override her concept of what is proper. Not long after the move from Minnie's flat, Carries agrees to live with Drouet.

After Carrie meets Hurstwood and they begin to see each other without Drouet's knowledge, Hurstwood wants Carrie to leave Drouet and to go with him. He promises Carrie that he will marry her. Carrie then undergoes an inner struggle as to whether she should leave a secure relationship with Drouet for an uncertain one with Hurstwood, even though Hurstwood promises to marry her.

Carrie enters another conflict when she begins working on the stage. She resents the fact that she has to spend all of her money for household expenses. Her "need of clothes--to say nothing of her desire for ornaments" causes her to lose sympathy for Hurstwood (SC, p. 324). Over a period of raises in her wages, Carrie broods over her problems. Finally she decides to leave Hurstwood. She puts twenty dollars and a letter on the table:

"Dear George," he read, crunching the money in one hand. "I'm going away. I'm not coming back anymore. It's no use trying to keep up the flat; I can't do it. I wouldn't mind helping you, if I could, but I can't support us both, and pay the rent. I need what little I make to pay for my clothes. I'm leaving twenty dollars. It's all I have just now. You can do whatever you like with the furniture. I don't want it.--Carrie." (SC, p. 364).

Thus, Carrie spends her adult life in a constant struggle between her desire for clothes and money and the conventional social patterns

she feels she should follow. Her personal desires always ultimately take precedence over social conventions, for "self-interest with her" is "her guiding characteristic" (SC, p. 6). These motivations allow her to flout the early twentieth-century conventional mores. However, Doubleday's verdict of immorality in *Sister Carrie* does not stem from the fact that Carrie is immoral but from the fact that "...Carrie not only escaped punishment--Dreiser did not even regard her as sinful."¹² According to F. O. Matthiessen, when *Sister Carrie* was written "there was one ideology by which to write a novel about a woman. It was to prove that as a matter of Christian sin, not even of cause and consequence... the woman was punished."¹³ In the same vein, Warner Bertoff states that:

What was most shocking was not that the country girl, Carrie Meeber, city-bound, let herself drift into being the mistress of one man and then another and into dropping them when they ceased to be of use to her; nor that she was not punished for her misconduct nor even that she never learned to think of it as misconduct and was not required to, as if she were immune to those processes of physical retribution assumed to be essential to the right ordering of respectable society.

It was rather that Dreiser had somehow completely excluded the possibility of her following any other course, and had made her behavior seem in fact a natural and even healthy response to a social order that was as little to be questioned (however unjust it seemed) as the caprices of the weather.¹⁴

¹²F. O. Matthiessen, "A Picture of Conditions," *Sister Carrie: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism*, ed. Donald Pizer (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 478.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 477.

¹⁴Warner Bertoff, *The Ferment of Realism* (New York: Free Press, 1965), pp. 238-239.

Clyde Griffiths' inner struggle also comes from wanting something better from life than his family now has. He catches a glimpse of the type of life style he would like to obtain when he is working as a bellhop at the Green-Davidson Hotel. He sees the well-dressed men and women and young men and girls and the cars and vehicles in which they arrive at the hotel for dinner. These people represent wealth, and wealth represents to Clyde the ability to have "other people like himself" to wait on them and to be able to go "how, where, and when you pleased" (AT, p. 47). Clyde feels that he "should wear a brown-belted coat," that "he should have a brown cap" and "a suit as well cut and attractive" as these other people have (AT, p. 50). According to Clyde, the forces that differentiate between those who are poor and those who are wealthy owe him a better life.

When Clyde is with the other bellhops, drinking and sex are also causes for inner conflict. He listens to Hegglund's description of his adventures at the brothels and is both "offened and depressed." He is "eager" for "almost any form of pleasure"...counter to all he had heard and been told to believe these many years..." (AT, p. 55). Clyde so much wants to be a part of the gaiety Hegglund describes that he agrees to go to the next "blow-out" at Fressell's. Once there Clyde has to decide between his desire to be a part of the group and his parents' teachings on the "horrors of drink and evil companionship" (AT, p. 60). Even though he has "...secretly rebelled against nearly all the texts and maxims to which his parents were always alluding..." this outward rebellion causes him to "think and

hesitate" (AT, p. 60). In order to quiet his conscience, he orders "Rhine wine and seltzer, too," because "... the rather temperate and even innocuous character of Rhine wine and seltzer had been emphasized by Hegg Lund and all the others..." (AT, p. 61). In addition to drinking, Clyde also must decide whether or not he will have sexual intercourse with Kinsella. In the end, Kinsella persuades him to accompany her upstairs. The second decision is easier to make because Clyde makes his major decision against conventional ideas when he decides to drink.

The episode with Hortense and the coat is another example of Clyde's conflict between his personal desire and what he feels he should do. Clyde should help his mother with the money for Esta. However, he knows that if he does not give Hortense the money for the coat, she will find someone else who will. Therefore, he shuns what society tells him is his responsibility to continue his relationship with Hortense.

Later Clyde begins to scheme other ways to do what he wants when he wants. He is working in the stamping department of his uncle's factory when he meets Roberta. He uses his assumed prestige to entice her to go out with him. Although he knows that he is not allowed to associate with the mill girls, he decides that this rule is "unfair and ridiculous" (AT, p. 257). Eventually his loneliness and desire for Roberta triumph over his conscience and he begins a relationship with her.

Clyde's most difficult struggle comes when he has to decide between saving Roberta or letting her drown. His conscience tells him to save her, but his "inner voice" reminds him that if Roberta dies he is free

to live and if he saves her, "...her living will make your life not worthwhile from now on..." (AT, p. 493). This decision is the most important one that he has to make, but he does not have time to debate with himself about this one as he had debated the others. While he struggles within himself, Roberta drowns and the decision is made for him.

Thus, Clyde struggles with his desire for "something better" and the conventional principles that he has been taught. As with Carrie, this struggle is constant. As Richard Lehan states, "Clyde is caught, in other words, between the world of his impoverished father and the world of the rich uncle, between his sense of duty to his family (and to Roberta whose situation ironically parallels his sister's) and his desire for a better life outside the family; between his early religious training and a world of material values."¹⁵ The conflict in Clyde's character helps to cause his death at the end of the novel. Clyde's desire for wealth and the fulfilled life wealth can buy leads him outside his natural environmental element and, like Hurstwood, "...it is only a matter of time before he will overreach himself..."¹⁶

When the novel ends, the situation of Clyde and Carrie are parallel. Dresier does not pass judgment on Carrie's conduct. He simply shows her as a product of both the forces that surround her and the basic forces

¹⁵Lehan, pp. 158-159.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 164

within her that crave a better way of life. By the same reasoning, Dreiser portrays Clyde as the product of the forces surrounding him and the forces within him. The fact that Clyde dies and Carrie lives is not the result of punishment for sin or lack of punishment for immoral conduct. The difference stems from the degree to which the characters are caught up in the environmental forces influencing their destinies and the power of those forces. The external forces controlling Carrie's life are of a milder nature than those controlling Clyde's life. Basically, both Drouet and Hurstwood are weak personalities. Carrie moves outside their influence when she feels that she can better her situation. Clyde, on the other hand, cannot escape the forces surrounding him. He becomes completely caught up in the power struggle in Cataraqui County. The personalities that Clyde encounters are stronger than Drouet and Hurstwood. As a result of the goals of the personalities, Clyde is sacrificed even though he was not actually committed murder. Fred Heit is willing to allow Clyde to be convicted so that he may obtain the judgeship he wants. Clyde's fate becomes lost in the struggle between his own lawyers and the district attorney. Last, Clyde is trapped by Reverend McMallin, who assumes that Clyde is guilty because of his plan to murder Roberta instead of whether or not Clyde actually committed the physical act.

Interwoven into the themes of family rejection and the conflict between desire and restraint is the theme of chance. Dreiser views chance as a two-edged sword--one edge of fate and the other of accident.

It is Carrie's fate that Drouet is on the same train when she travels to Chicago. She needs someone to introduce her to the thrills of the city. Drouet also gives Carrie a standard against which she measures the men and boys she encounters when looking for a job and working in the factory. Fate also plays a part in the type of man Drouet appears to be. He is well-dressed and represents the element of society--the fashionable--to which Carrie is drawn. Fate is still guiding Carrie when she meets Drouet once again on the street. Their lives seem to be drawn together by some indefinable force.

Hurstwood enters the novel and inevitably becomes involved with Carrie. He is fated to take an interest in Carrie since his own marital relationship is strained and he feels a need for affection and understanding.

However, accident takes over when the safe door at Fitzgerald and Moy's is left open. This accidental occurrence places Hurstwood in a moral dilemma. His problem is solved when the door "accidentally" shuts while Hurstwood still has the money out of the safe.

Carrie's acquaintance with the Vances is a product of fate. Carrie is not strong enough to stand alone and has to have someone to guide her in her social growth. Mrs. Vance provides that guidance. In addition to social guidance, Carrie needs someone to help her to grow mentally and emotionally. Fate provides Robert Ames as an intellectual mentor for Carrie.

Since Hurstwood is functioning outside his social habitat, he is doomed to fail. The fact that he loses money in poker games in an attempt

to increase his money points out destiny's way of indicating that he is going to fall farther down the social ladder.

Carrie's first small acting role is an accident. Drouet agrees to get someone for the lodge's benefit and does not do so. At the last minute he talks Carrie into taking the part. Later, in New York, Carrie's career is launched by a casual remark when the stage director tells Carrie to frown.

Both fate and accidental happenings are components of the theme of chance in human life as Dreiser portrays it. Carrie's life appears to be governed by chance. Chance shapes not only her life but also the lives of those who surround her.

Dreiser continues the theme of change in An American Tragedy and again separates chance into accidental happenings and fate. Clyde accidentally hears of an opening at the Green-Davidson Hotel and applies for a job there. He is given a job as bellhop, and he begins his way up from poverty.

Fate enters Clyde's life when he is one of the young people in a stolen car that hits and kills a small child. Although he is not driving, he knows that the car was taken without permission. Clyde is forced to flee to Kansas City.

Once in Chicago, he happens to meet Ratterer. Ratterer helps him get a job at the Union League Club. While working at the club, he sees his uncle for the first time.

Fate carries Clyde to Lycurgus, New York. Once there, Clyde's life is woven into a tighter web when he meets Sondra Finchley. Sondra appears

to be Clyde's hope for gaining social position. Not only does fate place him within Sondra's sphere, but it also places him within Roberta Alden's sphere. Roberta, whose background is similar to Clyde's, comes to work at the Griffiths' factory. Clyde cannot resist her appeal, and they become involved in a relationship that is forbidden by factory rules.

After Sondra meets Clyde at the Griffiths' house, she accidentally mistakes him for his cousin, Gilbert. She offers him a ride in her chauffeured car. Once she realizes her mistake, she takes a closer look at Clyde and begins to admire him.

Still, fate is not finished with Clyde. He continues his relationship with Roberta until she discovers that she is pregnant. During the time that Clyde is trying to decide what to do with Roberta, he reads an account of the drowning of a couple canoeing on Pass Lake. This newspaper article causes him to decide to murder Roberta. However, once they are on the lake, Clyde is unable to commit an actual murder. Roberta, nevertheless, is accidentally knocked over the side of the canoe and drowns.

The last role that fate plays in Clyde's life is to allow him to be tried for Roberta's death in Cataraqui County. Here he becomes the pawn in a political election. The county coroner, Fred Heit, wants a judgeship. Clyde is also the victim of a bitter battle between his own lawyers and the district attorney.

Therefore, chance plays an important part in both Sister Carrie and An American Tragedy. Dreiser shows that chance is made up of fate and

accident. Lehan states that "there is a gulf between what we see and its meaning, between appearance and reality, between the realm of chance and inevitability."¹⁷ The significant implication of Dreiser's use of chance is that it implies that man has no control over the events of his life. Regardless of an individual's choice, fate determines the final outcome. Inherent in Dreiser's theme of chance is the denial of the importance of religious and social morality in an individual's life in early twentieth-century society. In order to fulfill his destiny, an individual has to move beyond family ties and pursue personal desire. According to Dreiser, the individual is pushed into this pursuit by an undefeatable force--Chance.

Thus, the themes of the rejected family, the conflict between personal desire and conventional restraint, and the element of Chance are present in both Sister Carrie and An American Tragedy. By the end of each novel it is evident that the element of Chance is the dominant factor. The final outcome of the lives of both Clyde and Carrie appear to be caused by the environmental forces that surround them. It is by Chance that Carrie and Clyde are thrown into the orbit of these environmental forces. Both novels, therefore, contain the same elements. The fact that Carrie becomes a successful actress and Clyde dies for Roberta's death apparently is not caused by a sense of non-punishment or punishment on Dreiser's part but, rather, by the degree of the strength of the

¹⁷Lehan, p. 164.

forces by which both characters are caught. By way of deduction, the rejection of Sister Carrie and the acceptance of An American Tragedy is conceivably based upon the changing literary taste of the American public between 1900 and 1925.

CHAPTER II

CHANGING LITERARY TASTES

The United States was a growing nation in the years following the Civil War. The country underwent many technological advances as well as changes in its social and political structures. There was a shift in the public's attitudes toward their place in the social scheme of the country. The American people were exposed to new experiences and new ideas. Daniel J. Boorstin states that this was a time "of countless, little noticed revolutions, which occurred not in the halls of legislatures or on battlefields or on the barricades but in homes and farms and factories and schools and stores."¹⁸

These little-noticed revolutions occurred swiftly and immersed Americans throughout the United States in an atmosphere of constant change. These revolutions affected "not merely the continent but human experience itself; the very meaning of community, of time and space, of present and future, were being revised again and again; a new democratic world was being invented and was being discovered by Americans wherever they lived."¹⁹ This swift process of change, especially in the social structure, is surely a major reason for the acceptance of An American Tragedy twenty-five years after Sister Carrie was rejected in 1900. The themes of the rejected family, the conflict between personal desire and

¹⁸Daniel J. Boorstin, The Democratic Experience (New York: Random House, 1973), p. ix.

¹⁹Ibid.

conventional restraint, and the element of chance evolved from themes in Sister Carrie to recognizable ways of life by the time An American Tragedy was written.

The changes in American life style were the results of both domestic and foreign influences. One of the domestic influences was the shifting from an agrarian society to an urban one brought about by growth in industry. Cities such as New York and Chicago grew rapidly. This growth during the twenty-year period from 1900 to 1920 represents the greatest increase in population for both cities through 1970. New York increased in population 2,182,843 from 1900 to 1920²⁰ as opposed to an increase of 1,834,947 in 1940; 326,989 in 1960; and 113,579 in 1970.²¹ On the other hand, Chicago shows an increase of 1,003,130 from 1900 to 1920²² in contrast to an increase of 695,103 in 1940; 153,596 in 1960; and a decrease of 181,045 in 1970.²³ The promise of well-paying jobs in these cities lured people from farms and small towns. Therefore, Carrie Meeber, Clyde Griffiths, and Roberta Alden are fictional characters representative of the thousands of the people pouring into the cities.

In addition to the shift in population, the influx of immigrants helped to change the American social scene. They settled in special sections of the cities creating separate social structures within one location. Also, the heterogeneous work force in the factories exposed native-born Americans to the unconventional social customs of the immigrants. This

²⁰"New York, "Encyclopedia Britannica (1972), XVI, p. 432.

²¹Information Please Almanac, ed. Theodore B. Doimatch (New York: Information Please Publishing Inc., 1977), p. 757.

²²"New York," p. 1086.

²³Information Please Almanac, p. 754.

exposure is seen in Dreiser's two novels through the characters of Polish Mary and Dutch Lena.

The problem of maintaining a consistent perspective of social ethics was a difficult one. Blanche H. Gelfant expresses this problem:

Faced by conflicting traditions and alternate moral codes, the individual may find himself in a moral dilemma. Without a single guiding tradition he may feel himself caught in irreconcilable contradictions. Because his own relationship to any single group can change easily--because the entire social pattern of neighborhoods is constantly shifting--instability becomes a norm.²⁴

Moral ethics are based in large part upon religious principles. Fragmented social structures produced a variety of religious principles. Furthermore, the increased emphasis on industrial mechanization and business aided in producing moral conflicts. Gelfant states that "caught in serious contradictions between a business ethic and a moral ethic and the Christian ethic, an individual may find himself in a moral dilemma... Moreover, the constant pressures of a mechanized environment challenge religious convictions. Because the city man lives in a world created by man under the impulse of economic motives, he may become skeptical of supernatural explanations of life."²⁵ The rejection

²⁴Blanche H. Gelfant, The American City Novel: Thomas Wolfe, Sherwood Anderson, Edith Wharton, John Dos Passos, James T. Bishop, Willard Motley, and Others (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), p. 32.

²⁵Ibid., p. 34.

of Christian doctrine or moral ethics taught by parents is evident in the characters Carrie Meeber, Esta and Clyde Griffiths, and Roberta Alden. These characters also support Blanche Gelfant's point about the struggle between personal desire and conventional restraint. Thus, the influence of the industrial city played a part in social change.

Another internal influence causing change was the fall of the Genteel Tradition. The Genteel structure dominated society during the period after the Civil War.²⁶ According to Frederick Lewis Allen this period was a time when:

.....Not yet had the oncoming groups of journalists whom Theodore Roosevelt, in a burst of irritation, labeled "Muckrakers" begun to publish their remorseless studies of the seamy sides of American life. American fiction, like American journalism, was going through what old Ambrose Bierce called a "weak and fluffy period"; Dreiser's Sister Carrie, published in 1900, went almost unnoticed and then was withdrawn from circulation as too sordid or prongraphic. The best journals and the best people concerned themselves very little with the fortunes of the average man, and very much with the fortunes of ladies and gentlemen, with pomp and circumstance of society, and with the furthering of a polite and very proper culture of the elect.²⁷

In 1902, however, the journalists began to hack away at the double standards of the Genteel structure. These publicists probed into the dark corners of American life. Beginning in 1902 McClure's began publishing a series of articles by these investigative reporters. That year Ida M. Tarbell wrote The History of the Standard Oil Company which ran for fifteen months and revealed the methods Rockefeller and his

²⁷Frederick Lewis Allen, The Big Change: American Transforms Itself 1900-1950 (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1952), p. 5.

partners used to build the oil monopoly. Ray Stannard Baker, 1902-1904, investigated social and economic problems. He wrote about the Colorado coal strike which includes both labor problems and railroad malpractices.

Contemporaneous with muckraking in journalism was the vast amount of fiction dedicated to advancing the cause of democracy. Social and economic criticism ranged from harsh exposes to appeals for a middle-class revolt. Among these fiction writers were Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and David Graham Phillips. Norris told the story of the Southern Pacific Railroad's domination of the politics of California and the grain speculator's control of the wheat market. Dreiser based The Financier and The Titan on the career of Charles T. Yerkes, a traction magnate of Chicago in the 1890's. Phillip's The Great God Success and The Second Generation exploited the theme of the corrupting power of money. His Susan Lennox, Her Fall and Rise, depicted the social forces that drove a country girl in the city to prostitution.

Socialist literary critics were harsher than the fiction writers. Both Robert Hunter's Poverty and Ben B. Lindsey's The Beast condemned capitalism for making greed, exploitation, poverty, and corruption inevitable. The Bitter Cry of the Children by John Spargo called for child labor reform and damned a system that consumed its young. Jack London, in The Iron Heel, portrays the capitalistic system as brutal and repressive. In The Jungle, Upton Sinclair spoke out

against an economic system that brought hunger and misery to great masses of people.²⁸

The Roosevelt regime (1901-1909) did much to drive a wedge into the staunchness of the upper class. Roosevelt felt that the alternative to rule by private wealth was the development of a strong, efficient administrative state. He advanced the control of the Presidency. Roosevelt felt that national interest should overrule all sources of economic power. He asserted the supremacy of the middle classes over the private interests of the elite rich.²⁹

The major external influences were in the form of philosophical, sociological, and psychological ideas from other countries but expressed by American authors in American literary works. These ideas included pragmatism, Marxism, naturalism, and Freudianism. By 1900 American had been exposed to pragmatism in the field of education through William James and John Dewey. Pragmatic ideas had been the basis of American enterprise. However, Edwards and Horton state that "...the ordinary citizen still believed that the law and the government were in principles perfect and incorruptable. Law as the human reflection of Divine Justice and the Constitution had been framed upon the model of the perfectly self-regulating Newtonian Universe.

²⁸Arthur S. Link, American Epoch: A History of the United States Since the 1890's (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), pp. 75-77

²⁹Link, p. 95.

To question the finality of either would have been to commit a sacrilege."³⁰ Nevertheless, over the next twenty-five years there was a change in social legislation. Always before, social legislation was considered an interpretation of the law rather than a literal enactment. Through the efforts of Oliver Wendell Holmes, a reinvestigation of the judicial system came about. Holmes "...had enunciated in The Common Law the principle that the law had always grown out of human experience."³¹ This recognition of individual rights gave the people a new feeling of freedom and tolerance and put them in the proper frame of mind for the criticism of society that appears in Dreiser's An American Tragedy. At the same time, they would probably be more tolerant toward the lack of moralistic elements in the novel. The American society was beginning to become a society based upon the will of the individual.

At the same time Dreiser was writing Sister Carrie, Marxism was beginning to gain influence in the United States. This expansion had reached its peak in 1912 through the efforts of Eugene V. Debs. Allen states that:

.....Eugene V. Debs was a one-time locomotive foreman. He had led the pullman strike of 1894, and served a term in prison, had consumed Marxist literature in his cell, and had become an ardent Socialist. His exalted hopes were to take shape in the 1900 platform of the Social Democratic party, as whose candidate Debs would be merely a beginning; had Debs but known it then, he was destined to have nearly a million followers by 1912.³²

³¹ Edwards and Horton, p. 176.

³² Allen, p.6.

By 1912, the American people had been thoroughly exposed to socialism in politics. The American people had been brought into contact with a different type of government causing many people to reevaluate the basic principles of American democracy.

Emile Zola's naturalism also spread to the United States. Edwards and Horton express the belief that:

Naturalism in literature is the product of despair. In it we see reflected the shattering of the optimistic idealism of the Enlightenment...Ideals, morals, the spirituality of the universe are to him (the naturalist) empty dreams, undemonstrated and undemonstrable. God is dead; metaphysics is idle time-wasting.³³

In 1899, Stephen Crane wrote:

A man said to the universe:
"Sir, I exist!"
"However," replied the Universe,
"The fact has not created in me
A sense of obligation."³⁴

Here Crane expresses the idea that man is alone in the universe and must fend for himself. This is seemingly true of Dreiser's characters. The religious teachings of their parents are merely practices forced upon them. When the characters break away from the family stronghold, their religion does not sustain them. This view of man's place in the universe is directly opposite to conventional teachings that there is a Supreme Being dwelling in the universe that is responsible for man.

³³Allen, p. 246.

³⁴Stephen Crane, "A Man Said to the Universe," What Was Naturalism? ed. Edward Stone (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1959), p. 116.

Dreiser's characters reflect Crane's ideas concerning the Universe as well as Dreiser's own views. Dreiser, like his characters, found little comfort in his family's religious beliefs. Claude M. Simpson states that "One of Dreiser's strongest youthful impressions was that his father's religious orthodoxy did not keep the family solvent, that a paternal dogmatic theology was powerless to prevent one of the sons from becoming an alcoholic and two of the daughters from losing their virtue."³⁵ The American people were further exposed to naturalism through works such as Frank Norris' Vandover and the Brute, The Octopus, and The Pit; Jack London's The Sea Wolf and The Call of the Wild; and Dreiser's Jennie Gerhardt, The Financier, and The Titan.

Criteria for naturalism were 1) an attempted objectivity, 2) frankness, 3) an amoral attitude toward material wealth, 4) a philosophy of determinism, 5) pessimism, and 6) the projection of a "strong" character of a marked animal or neurotic nature.³⁶ All of the above characteristics directly oppose conventional moral and religious codes. A strict religious code does not allow for objectivity. Religious practices were to be obeyed, not questioned. Social and religious ethics demanded morality, not an indifference to morality. Determinism left no room for the religious theory that the universe and man were

³⁵Theodore Dreiser, Sister Carrie, ed. Claude Simpson (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1959), p. vii.

³⁶Edwards and Horton, p. 260.

guided by a Supreme Being. Pessimism showed none of the hope with which a "Christian" was to face each day. Last, the strong were to take care of the weak, not become predatory animals. All of the exponents of naturalism lead to a weakening of the religious and social structures. Dreiser develops these elements in Sister Carrie and An American Tragedy by writing objectively about American life as he saw it. Carrie and Clyde are both examples of naturalistic behavior. Dreiser neither condoned nor condemned his characters' behavior. He simply ignored the possibility of retaliation from a higher source than society itself. The search for materialism left little time for dwelling on religious and asocial precepts. Exposure, through literature, provided the American people with a view of their society that had never been expressed before. This view showed them a type of social and business world that proved more beneficial to the individual than did a world based on Christian principles and self-denial.

In addition to the naturalistic movement, Freudianism was introduced into American literature by Gertrude Stein's influence on the group of American writers she called the "lost generation." Disillusionment and rebellion characterized these writers--disillusionment over the crusading spirit that had accompanied the United States into World War I, anger at the way in which writers felt that they had been repressed by dogma and convention in their youth, and scorn for the vulgarity of the business civilization of the day.³⁷

³⁷Allen, p. 137.

They had become disillusioned and embittered by World War I and found the literary ideals of the time too confining. They were unable to conform to what they felt were outmoded values.

Therefore, they traveled throughout Europe in search for meaningful ideas that could be expressed in more innovative literary styles. Stein's own novels, Three Lives and The Long Gay Book, began a movement of psychological literature--a probing of the mind of the individual.³⁸ She did through literature what Freud did through psychological experiments. Her ideas influenced writers such as Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and John Dos Passos. This new method of psychological probing is evident in novels such as Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, The Triumph of the Egg, and Many Marriages and also in Eugene O'Neill's plays such as Beyond the Horizon, Different, and Desire Under the Elms. In his plays O'Neill turned Freud and the stream-of-consciousness literary technique to themes which an earlier generation would have found shocking. Hemingway convinced the younger intellectuals that they were indeed a lost generation and that there was little left for them but drink and sex.³⁹ Although Dreiser's Sister Carrie and An American Tragedy are not as psychologically profound as Anderson's and O'Neill's works, Dreiser reveals the drives

³⁸The United States in Literature, ed. Robert C. Pooley (New Jersey: Scott Foresman, and Company, 1968), p. 458.

³⁹Allen, pp. 137-138.

that motivate his characters. There was a feeling among the writers that one could at last shake off the traditional restraints upon candor and could tell the truth about people and society.⁴⁰ By 1925, the American reader had been exposed to Freud's psychological theories indirectly through literature. Therefore, the typical reader would be more willing to examine the character's motives before condemning the character's actions.

An internal and external influence for change, and perhaps the most important one, was World War I and the period following referred to as the Roaring Twenties. The war caused a feeling of urgency and doom. The male population lived under the threat of going off to war and perhaps never returning. Most of the country felt that war would "...make the world safe for democracy."⁴¹ However, democracy was not the main concern of many American businessmen who became rich selling war supplies. In addition, many profiteers used their wealth to gain special concessions such as exemption from duty for themselves and their sons. Through this exploitation of war at the cost of thousands of lives, "many thoughtful Americans were disillusioned."⁴² Although Dreiser does not write about the war, it was one of the influences helping to change individuals' attitudes toward conventional

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Pooley, p. 443.

⁴²Pooley, p. 443.

social and religious standards. Because of the dangers of war, sexual taboos were set aside so that people might live for the present. In order to sell the war to the American people, President Wilson began a "make the world safe for democracy" campaign by setting up the committee on Public Information. The committee immediately began a propaganda campaign. Link states that:

As a consequence an official line was sold to the American people. One side of the propaganda glorified American participation in terms of an idealistic crusade to advance the cause of freedom and democracy throughout the world--a concept that the President constantly iterated in 1917 and 1918. The other side portrayed the German menace in the most lurid colors; in terms of the Hun attempting to despoil Europe and extend his dominion to the Western Hemisphere.⁴³

However, Allen states that:

During the three or four years that followed the Armistice of 1918 there came a subtle change in the emotional weather. The touch of idealism that had kindled the revolt of the American conscience seemed to have burned itself out. People were tired. In particular their public spirit, their conscience, and their hopes were tired... People felt that it was about time to relax; to look after themselves, rather than other people⁴⁴ and the world in general; and to have a good time.

Many people found it hard to believe in the principles of a "Christian nation" while the United States was engaged in international mass killings.

⁴³Link, p. 213

⁴⁴Allen, p. 131.

The period of the twenties was a time of violent strikes, falling food prices for the farmers, bigotry of the Ku Klux Klan, and a return to isolationism. It was also "...an age marked by the shocking decline of that idealism which we have continually cited as a major part of the American temper. An age when patriotism among the young turned into cynical disillusionment."⁴⁵

Organized crime and violence and corruption flourished. Police officials did not break the power of the gangs. Prohibition began in 1917, and syndicates became wealthy from "bathtub gin" and organized gambling and prostitution. Not only did organized syndicates ignore prohibition but according to Allen:

The prohibition law--that curious final product of the American conscience--had not been long on the books before people began to flout it right and left; pretty soon a great many men and women who had always considered themselves patterns of lawabiding respectability began to patronize bootleggers, or homebrew very peculiar beer, or concoct even queerer bathtub gin, or wear hip-flasks to parties.⁴⁶

It became difficult for the youth of the nation to live by the ethical standards of their parents. They saw little reason to observe archaic ethics that did not correspond to life in the twenties. The youth began to revolt. The revolt was expressed in their dress, music, literature, and code of ethics.

In 1900 the dress and manners of the youth were designed along the

⁴⁵Edwards and Horton, p. 294.

⁴⁶Allen, pp. 131-132.

unalterable lines of propriety. Women's skirts swept the streets, and all females were required to wear a hat at all times when out of doors. They were bundled in layer upon layer of underthings--chemise, drawers, corset, corset cover, and one or more petticoats. Men's fashions were formal and stiff. According to Allen:

These implacable costumes, male and female, reflected the prevailing credo as to the relations between the sexes. The ideal woman was the sheltered lady, swathed not only in silk and muslin but in innocence and propriety, and the ideal man, whether a pillar of rectitude or a gay dog, virtuously protected the person and reputation of such tender creatures as were entrusted to his care. If unmarried, a girl must be accompanied by a chaperone whenever she ventured out to an evening's entertainment in the city.⁴⁷

"Even when I was thirty years old" wrote Gerald James W. Gerard in his old age, "if I had asked a girl to dine with me alone, I would have been kicked down her front steps. If I had offered her a cocktail, I would have been tossed out of society for my boorish effrontery."⁴⁸

In the early nineteen twenties, however, these codes had changed. There was a desire to "...shake off the restraints of puritanism, to upset the long-standing conventions of decorum."⁴⁹ The rebellion that expanded in the twenties had its origin much earlier demonstrated in the dance craze of 1912 to the music of Irving Berlin's jazz. Another show of rebellion had been the Armory Show of 1913, which had exhibited modern art that shocked the public. There was also an outburst of free verse among rebellious poets. Furthermore, the war had given the youth

⁴⁷Allen, pp. 9-10.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 133.

a taste of freedom from restraint. For many of these young people "...it was easy for them to think of themselves as a generation who had been condemned to go through the hell of war because of the mistakes of their elders, whose admonitions on any subject must therefore be suspect."⁵⁰

The new music and new dances were considered immoral. Berlin's "Alexander's Rag Time Band" began a new music with radically different beat and accent. The mood was different. The titles were brash and considered cheap and the lyrics faintly suggestive. Two such tunes were "Oh! You Beautiful Doll" and "The Gaby Glide." Rag-time stirred the blood and set feet to tapping. The new music called for new dances--the conga, the mixie, the one-step, the turkey trot, the grizzly bear, and the bunny hug. These dances had two things in common: 1) the partners held each other in a close embrace and 2) they moved around the floor with abandon.⁵¹

In the twenties the girls in many ways spearheaded the youth rebellion. They decided that dancing without a corset was much more personal and satisfactory. A drink of illegal whiskey from an escort's hip-flask added zest to a party. Daughters talked frankly about sex and the libido. They reveled in the freedom of the new styles, which by 1925 had lifted the hemline all the way to the knee. There was a

⁵⁰Allen, pp. 133-134.

⁵¹Paul M. Angle, Crossroads: 1913 (New York: Rand McNally & Company, 1963), pp. 87-88.

sharp increase in women who smoked. The cocktail was introduced and there was mixed drinking. There was a playful attitude toward sex among young people and a more tolerant attitude toward divorce and extramarital affairs. Many women were asserting the right to enjoy themselves like and with men.⁵²

Allen further states that:

Along with this relaxation of the social code went a wave of religious skepticism--wasn't science making mince-meat out of old-time religion?--and of hedonism. Among young men and women who prided themselves on their modern-mindedness there was a disposition to regard church work or social service work or anything else to which the word "uplift" could be applied as "poisonous" and an unwarranted intrusion upon other people's privacy; and besides, one had a right to enjoy oneself, and taking a ride in a sedan⁵³ of a Sunday morning was much more fun than going to church.

Although Dreiser does not directly include the historical events of the early twenties, many of the prevalent moods are reflected in An American Tragedy. Carrie Meeber in Sister Carrie was an exception to the social order when she became the mistress of two men. However, Clyde Griffiths in An American Tragedy is more or less the norm for the youth of 1925. Clyde is caught up in the forces of change set into motion by events during and following the war. Present in An American Tragedy is the disillusionment of the youth. Clyde searches for a better way of life only to have his search end in death. Political corruption and ambition pay an important part in Clyde's death as

⁵²Allen, pp. 135-136.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 136-137.

did the sanctimonious condemnation by Reverend McMillan. Also, music and dress are especially important in An American Tragedy. In addition to these minor elements is the major element of Clyde's code of ethics. His sense of propriety is governed by whether or not he thinks that being a model person will help him gain material wealth. Dreiser uses the party scenes in the novel to represent the progression of Clyde's social development as well as to reveal his developing mental and ethical outlook. The party at Frissell's with the bellhops from the Green-Davidson begins Clyde's public withdrawal from his parents' teachings. Before, his rebellion had been an inward one. This party leads to his first drink and later his first sexual encounter. Later in the novel he is persuaded to travel in a stolen car to a party at the Wigwam. On the return to Kansas City, the car is involved in an accident in which a young girl is killed. This incident causes Clyde to become a fugitive because he would rather flee than to face the consequences of the accident. Clyde then travels to Lycurgus where he becomes involved with his uncle's family, Sondra Finchley, and Roberta Alden. It is at a party that Clyde and Sondra discover a mutual attraction although Clyde has been having an affair with Roberta. Beginning with the New Year's Eve party, Clyde becomes caught up in the social scenes in Lycurgus. His preoccupation with Sondra and the social parties causes Clyde's inner conflict when Roberta discovers that she is pregnant. This conflict eventually causes Roberta's death. Therefore, the parties in An American Tragedy reflect Clyde's attitude of living for himself.

One of the most effective of the writers expressing the attitudes of rebellious youth was F. Scott Fitzgerald. He believed that moral indifference was a characteristic of the "new" youth. He felt that this moral apathy "...fostered indifference toward everything that did not concern one directly... It led to the ready surrender to materialism of taste and good judgment."⁵⁴ He expressed these views in both This Side of Paradise and The Great Gatsby. Dreiser reflects this moral indifference in An American Tragedy.

Another internal influence, one that covered the span of 1900-1925 and is still in effect today, was the automobile revolution. In 1900, American life was slow-paced. There were only 13,824 automobiles. The automobile was considered a play-toy for the sporting rich for only the rich could afford one and only a person willing to gamble with his life would ride in one. American life was a horse-and-carriage existence.⁵⁵ In 1915, there were fewer than two and a half million cars registered in the United States; in 1920, nine million; and by 1925 nearly twenty million. There were several social results of the automobile revolution including: 1) motorized suburbs more than a mile away from the nearest railroad station, 2) an end to isolation of the farmer, 3) broadened geographical horizons especially for those who had before considered themselves too poor to travel, and 4) a weakening of

⁵⁴Pooley, p. 443.

⁵⁵Allen, pp. 7-8.

the roots that held a family to one spot.⁵⁶

Thus, the American people were caught up in uncontrollable forces that shaped and molded their society just as uncontrollable forces shaped the lives of Carrie Meeber and Clyde Griffiths. The people were exposed to external forces in the form of social and political philosophies and to the internal forces of growing industrial and urban communities. In addition to all the other influences, they were plunged into a war that did not touch them directly except that the American forces joined in mass murder. They were disillusioned by the rebellion in the youth of the nation. All of these forces and influences were put before the American reading public to develop a tolerance for literature that expressed ideas that deviated from the conventional social ethics. There was an extensive breakdown of morality and ethical principles. In light of these changes, the publishers of An American Tragedy apparently felt that American readers were ready to be exposed to the ideas and events of Dreiser's novel.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 124-130.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

An examination of the evidence available shows that Harper's Weekly, Harper and Brothers, and Doubleday, Page all refused to publish Sister Carrie in 1900. Doubleday felt that the novel was obscene. Even though Dreiser forced Doubleday to publish the novel, it was not strongly promoted. On the other hand, in 1925, An American Tragedy was readily accepted for publication and sale of the novel was promoted by an essay contest.

Doubleday objected to the subject matter found in Sister Carrie. However, the same subject matter is also found in An American Tragedy. Dreiser's themes of rejected family, conflict between personal desire and conventional restraint, and chance are found in both novels. In developing the themes in both novels, Dreiser depicts practices that violated acceptable social standards. These violations include premarital sex, adultery, theft, the workings of chance rather than guidance by a Supreme Being, a breakdown of religious teachings, and the omission of Divine retaliation for sins. Through Clyde's death, Dreiser sets forth the ideal that the only authority is one that is determined by society and at times this authority may operate from greed rather than a sense of fairness..

Since both Sister Carrie and An American Tragedy contain similar subject matter, the change in publishers' attitudes toward the two novels

resulted from a change in American social and religious ethics rather than from a change in Dreiser's style. This change was brought about by several internal and external influences. Internal influences included 1) a change from an agrarian society to an urban one caused by industrial growth, 2) the challenge of religious convictions by the constant pressure of a mechanized society, 3) the fall of the Genteel Tradition and the exposure of its corruption by journalists and authors, and 4) the Automobile Revolution. The external influences were far-reaching. Immigration brought to America different social and religious customs. Native-born Americans were exposed to these customs in large part through working in the factories. Pragmatism, Marxism, naturalism, and Freudianism widely influenced American thought. Pragmatism was introduced to America by William James and John Dewey but was given practical application in social legislation through the efforts of Oliver Wendell Holmes. Marxism led to the Socialist Movement which reached its peak in 1912 largely through the efforts of Debs and caused many to re-evaluate the ideas underlying American democracy. Zola's naturalism was introduced to American readers through the writings of Crane, Norris, London, and Dreiser among others. Naturalistic concepts were more adaptable to an industrial society than conventional religious and social concepts. Gertrude Stein adapted Freudianism to the literature of the period. Her writings influenced American writers such as Anderson, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Dos Passos.

An internal-external influence that served to set off a chain--reaction in America was World War I. The war resulted in disillusionment

and loss of belief for many in America as a nation founded on Christian principles. Following the war, especially in the early twenties, America saw violent strikes, falling food prices for farmers, a rise of influence of the Ku Klux Klan, the return to isolationism, a decline in idealism, a turning away from patriotism by the young, and organized crime resulting from Prohibition.

All of these elements clearly left deep impressions on the youth of the country. They felt that the ethical standards of their parents did not correspond to life in the twenties. Rebellion against the standards of their parents was expressed through dress, music, and an attitude of moral indifference. This rebellion is depicted in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels as well as in Dreiser's An American Tragedy.

Thus, an examination of the evidence supports the contentions 1) that there is a significant similarity in the subject matter of Sister Carrie and An American Tragedy, 2) that both internal and external influences served to expose American society to customs and ideas that opposed conventional moral and social ethics, and 3) that these customs and ideas were becoming incorporated into the American lifestyle. It is most likely then that the publishers' acceptance of An American Tragedy, twenty-five years after the rejection of Sister Carrie, to a significant degree reflects a change in America's moral and social standards rather than a change in Dreiser's writing style or subject matter.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Frederick Lewis. The Big Change: America Transforms Itself 1900-1950. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1952.
- Angle, Paul M. Crossroads: 1913. New York: Rand McNally & Company, 1963.
- Barrows, Marjorie Wescott, Frances L. Hueston, and Marcus Konick. The Study of Literature. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1959.
- Bertoff, Warner. The Frement of Realism. New York: Free Press, 1965.
- Boorstin, Daniel J. The Democratic Experience. New York: Random House, 1973.
- Dreiser, Theodore. An American Tragedy. New York: New American Library, 1964.
- _____. Sister Carrie: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism. ed. Donald Pizer, New York: W. W. Norton, 1970.
- _____. Sister Carrie. ed. Claude Simpson. Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1959.
- Edwards, Herbert W. and Robert W. Horton. Backgrounds of Literary Thought. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967.
- Gelfant, Blanche, H. The American City Novel: Theodore Dreiser, Thomas Wolfe, Sherwood Anderson, Edith Wharton, John Dos Passos, James T. Bishop, Willard Motley, and Others. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969.
- Information Please Almanac. ed. Theodore B. Doimatch, New York: Information Please Publishing, Inc., 1977.
- Link, Arthur S. American Epoch: A History of the United States Since the 1890's. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955.
- Orton, Vrest. Dreiserana: A Book About His Books. New York: The Cocorua Bibliographies, 1929.

Pooley, Robert C., ed. The United States in Literature. New Jersey: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1968.

Stone, Edward, ed. What Was Naturalism? New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1959.